

Oneirata 2022



Cover art by Joan Moon

Oneirata

2022

The Literary Magazine of Hastings High School

Editor in Chief

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Ms. Walters

Editor's Note

While putting this magazine together, I've been able to reflect on my time in Hastings. I've spent a lot of time in the high school lately, experimenting with Microsoft Word on a desktop in the English office. I've been given another way to say goodbye to this place and the people that I see 5 days a week from 8:15 to 2:45. This year's edition of *Oneirata* reflects the talent flowing through the walls of Hastings High School. As the editor of this magazine, I've been able to soak up and admire pieces of that talent. It has been a pleasure, and I hope you enjoy the final product.

A Note from Ms. Walters

Last year's magazine reflected the year we'd just had. Many pieces focused on student's experiences during fully remote learning or hybrid and how we'd grown reliant on our phones and television shows for connection and comfort. What you'll find here is a return to the full scope of imagination and creativity, one less encumbered by the weight of COVID; we've had a more varied year and the writing and art reflects that. I still love that this magazine is a place where students can be published and their work shared with the public. Thank you to Mr. Merchant, Ms. Solaski, and to all students who submitted their work for us to enjoy. Sabine, you were an organized, reliable, steady co-editor. It was a pleasure to work with you. I wish you all a wonderful summer.

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Beignets

The pleasant warmth of the pastries
Wafted to every corner
Filling the room with a sense of comfort
The slightest sweetness of powdered sugar
floated graciously in the air
Landing directly on the beignets
The soft powdered pastry gently touched my skin
As I held onto it tight
Feeling for the center of the warmth
Powdered sugar flew to the ground
As if they were snowflakes falling beautifully
From the sky, only to hit the ground
I couldn't help but bite into it
And before I knew it, I did
I haven't even noticed
Then again,
And again,
Every second wasted, with a new bite
I couldn't stop myself
The warmth and joy spread instantly through my mouth
Graciously infecting every corner of my body
It brought me into a daze, the powdered sugar
Melted in my mouth with delight
Followed by the warm, moist baked dough
The beignet had satisfied my mouth
Filling it with the feelings of warmth and love
There's a certain thing about beignets
They are very delicious,
But without the powdered sugar
It would just be the sweetened dough
And nothing more
But when the two combine
They create heaven on earth

Emma Schlacter

The Apple

As soon as the crisp stem
popped off the branch before my arms,
It wrinkled into a brown hue as it stared at me
With its flattened end and threatening maroon blotches.

You have no business being here, it warned,
Hiking through the exasperating mud
Staining your sweatpants with dirt
and slipping through the frigid air of Upstate New York

Ok, and what are you going to do-
You were bonded to a tree before you met your demise
Waiting to be placed in a paper bag along with your fellow apples -
I responded as a slight smirk that overlined my mouth.

As my laborious autumnal tradition
with its pumpkin patches and spiced cider stands
was not only humbled by the sight of endless orchards
and the laughter of families caressed by the frigid air but with pity

even after my family baked it into a pie
with the remains of the stem submerged inside the garbage can
and the peeled skin piled on the cutting board with that of the cinnamon bottle
horridly seen, paper towel soaking up of what was once left

Victoria Lugomer-Pomper

Road Trip to Heaven

As I drive down the empty highway I look past the empty stores and the abandoned skyscrapers, beyond the empty mist that leads my way and covers the road. I try to see past it all, the mountains, the hills and the valleys, the endless rivers and oceans that cover the land. I try to see what's past it all. Even now as the stars dance and the moon parades around the sky, the dark sea that is the night sky pushes against the windows and all I can do is see past it all, trying to find the end.

Jael Sanchez



Liam Shanley

54 Dillard

It was 8 am on August 26th, 2018 - better known as “move-in day” at the University of Virginia. My dad drove the black minivan from the hotel to the road in front of my sister’s dorm, which sat on top of almost one hundred steps. As he parked, I could see other families doing the same as we were about to do: lug brown cardboard boxes up the stone stairs. When I stepped out of the minivan, my dad passed me a box and a vacuum-sealed bag. I looked at the stairs ahead of me and started to march up.

Finally, I made it to 54 Dillard and allowed my arms to release my sister’s belongings onto the floor. She unlocked the door, and more stairs awaited us. I hoisted the box and bag back into my arms and wobbled up the last flight of stairs. Inside the room, there were two of every standard dorm room item: desk, closet, and twin-sized bed. I glimpsed at the mirroring items for just one second before my sister commanded me to run back down the stone stairs to get more boxes.

Half an hour later, I made my last breathless trip up to the room. This time, my grandma, Lolo, followed me. I slammed a box labeled “winter clothes” down. A Jell-O-like sensation tingled my arms. The room was unchanged. My sister had not touched one box. Instead, she sat at her wooden desk, flipping through a white folder with a schedule of orientation events. I looked at Lolo, and we both knew how this day would go down. We would be the ones unpacking and organizing.

I began to fold dozens of shirts, placing them neatly in the drawers. I hung pants already clipped to hangers in the closet. I put a jewelry organizer on her desk and looped necklaces on its dainty metal arms. Lolo gracefully placed my sister’s comforter into a duvet cover, something that only she was oddly good at. I ran scissors across the top of the last box, which made a satisfying tearing noise. Inside, I found a dark brown shoe rack - unassembled.

I stared down at the miscellaneous pieces. I knew I could not build this monstrosity alone, so I called my dad to help. He chose to skip reading the directions and attempted to put the rack together like a puzzle. I realized that my decision to ask him to help was unwise.

The next hour was hard to watch. I saw my dad try to mold the rods together as if they were clay and could be bent. I noticed that my dad had not used the included screws, which made me wonder how this shoe rack stood on its own. As my dad shoved the last rod into its alleged place, the whole thing crashed down. The clacking of the pieces colliding with each other stung my ears. My dad declared that he was done with the day’s moving-in activities.

Lolo and I sat on the short hallway floor and began reading the booklet of directions. Soon enough, the brown shoe rack was built. I positioned it in the last empty corner of my sister’s side of the room and gave her various versions of white sneakers a home.

After my sister examined every inch of her side of the room, ensuring it was to her extremely particular liking, she thanked me for how much I had done. She had no complaints, so my body exploded with joy. I made her proud, something that I valued as a little sister.

To me, greatness means feeling accomplished. It means doing something to put a smile on someone else's face. I feel great when I do something challenging, and I get results. Seeing my sister happy as we closed the door to her dorm room that move-in day made it worth lugging those brown cardboard boxes and slippery vacuum-sealed bags up the one hundred stairs to 54 Dillard.

Tess Iosepovici



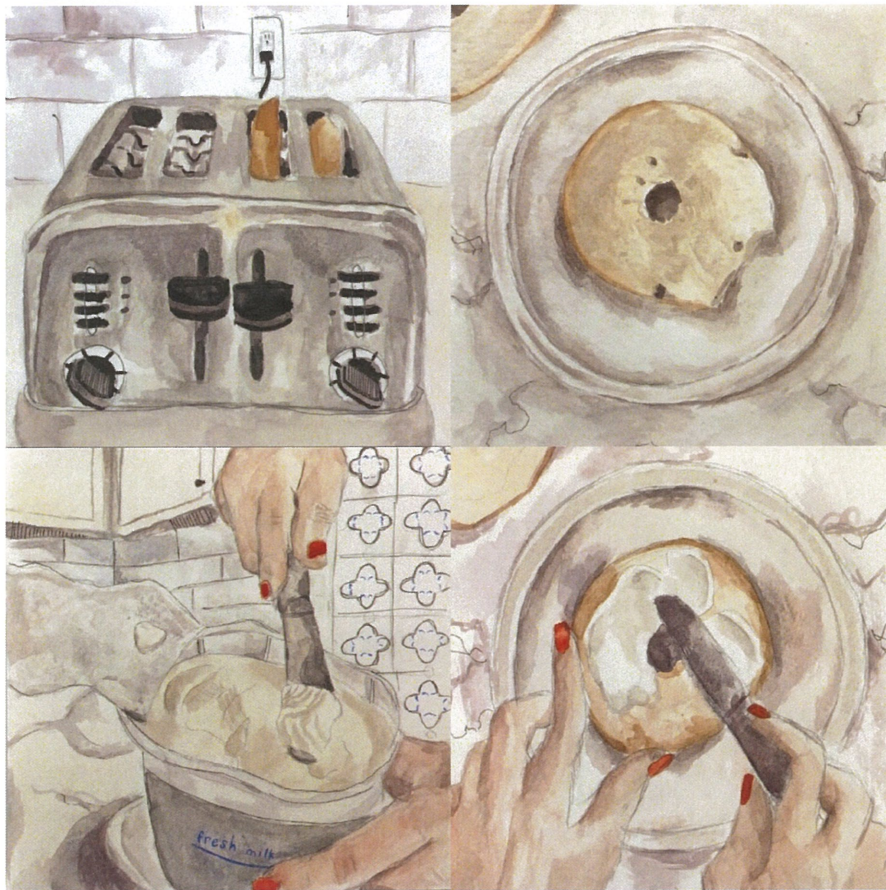
Aya Hinawi

home

i don't know what my home is.
it's a place where i am free from the desperate grasp of those who take so much from me,
their prying hands slowly cutting off my blood as i find myself unable to move;
it's my own mental prison,
my deepest anxieties ripping me away from those who i love;
it's the place where my inner demons run rampant;
it's the only place where i can breathe.

i'm not scared of any,
and that's the scary part.
but why would i be afraid of my own creation?
am i a modern day frankenstein?

Zoe Fingleton



Cara Novak

Dear Amy

Dear Amy March,
I am writing because I think we could be great friends.
You also seem to be great at giving advice.
We are both silly and smart,
and sometimes childish.
I bet you did not think
burning Jo's book through.
I think impulsively too,
lashing out when I feel overwhelmed.
You can relate,
I hope so at least.

You seem to read others' emotions very well
something I wish I could do.
The other day
my friends invited me to hangout,
but only because another friend was not able to.
How did you get over being chosen second?
as the final option?
I mean—Jo declined Laurie's offer
and you accepted his proposal?
I just wonder how or if you ever get used to it?
Being chosen last I mean,
loved last.
You are the youngest
so I bet you understand.
When Jo and Laurie went out on the pond,
did you feel jealous?
Or just disappointed.

Franny Kastner

The Sonata Blues

It would have been impossible to tell the difference between the snow-blanketed Tudor-style houses, but Maria could tell by Bird's melodic lines seeping through the walls that number 57 belonged to Evelyn.

Bird, Bird, Bird. Yardbird. Yardbird was really Charlie Parker, a jazz icon. Maria hummed along the euphonic phrases of "Donna Lee" as rapidly as she could while her snow boots crunched along in the semi-frozen snow. She could smell the string beans roasting on the stove in Evelyn's red tiled kitchen, a staple holiday side dish. Maria's left hand stayed compressed in her pocket, painfully so but warm, and her right hand faced the wind, gripping the handle of her saxophone case. The case softly bumped against her leg as she climbed up the stairs past the wooden gate, leaving a chevron pattern from the soles of her boots gnawed into the snow. She could smell cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie and turkey and chestnuts and Evelyn's broken fireplace; the scent of charred wood and a smoke-filled room was very nostalgic.

Evelyn appeared at the door before Maria's feet had reached the black mat caked with dirt and leaves and old snow that sat before the front door. "Maria!" she shrieked, wrapping her arms around her best friend who really needed a mug of hot chocolate.

"Hi, Evelyn!" she responded once she had been released, although quite less enthusiastic than her ecstatic childhood friend had been. "May I come in?"

Evelyn gestured Maria into her house, telling her to excuse the barking dog and get yourself settled and should I turn down the music? Maria agreed softly to everything Evelyn had exclaimed and put down her saxophone.

Maria shied away into the corner of the room, her heart starting to race. *Should I tell her I can't play the sonata? Will she judge me?*

"Maria, I haven't heard you play in so long! Would you like to play the Bach sonata for me? I can sing along - if you don't want to have to grab some knives and stab yourself in the ears!"

Blood rushed to Maria's cheeks. *No, that's okay, I'm not super practiced.* "Um, yes. Let me just...open my case..."

Maria unsnapped the buckles of her case with her right hand and skillfully attached the neck, mouthpiece, reed, and ligature with one hand as Evelyn raced to her egg timer and pulled out a tray of chestnuts. Maria clipped the neck strap to her instrument and hoisted the strap overhead, letting it settle on the back of her neck. Finally, safe behind her shimmering horn, she released her hand from her pocket.

"You can start, I'm listening," Evelyn hollered from the kitchen. Maria took a deep breath and began the transposed flute sonata. As she began to get into the music, her cheekbones unfroze, and her toes relaxed; she felt more at home than ever. Evelyn proceeded to the living room, where she sat down with a bowl of chestnuts, mesmerized. However, Maria started to get anxious as soon as she approached the high-pitched section requiring her to go up a register and use her left thumb. It was getting closer and closer, and Maria's heartbeat was managing a faster and faster tempo.

There she was. A high note she could no longer play seemed to stare at her from midair, floating in malicious excitement, quivering like a fruit fly. She stopped and stared

at Evelyn, stuffing her hand back into her pocket. "What's wrong, Maria? That's our favorite part!"

Maria sighed and remembered how she and Evelyn had made friends. As a child, Evelyn loved to play outside. She liked exploring the woods and building fairy houses, climbing trees and making arrows for her homemade bow. She liked to sing songs about happy things, like driving really fast with your hair flying out the window and running in a field of flowers. She would play on the swing set at school, flying off and pretending that she was a superhero. She was the one to comfort the sad, and she never let perilous events infiltrate her happy conjecture. Evelyn was a bouncy child, one who was not afraid to break rules but was always kind in the end. She was a carefree kid, oblivious to the future of adulthood. She listened to the music of joy and of magnificence, and so did Maria. They had met at summer camp, two misfit nerds without any sense of fashion and a keen desire for music. One evening, a guest musician performed for the young campers, allowing Evelyn and Maria to bond over a beautiful melody. Maria didn't want to ruin her contented companion, to scar her, to frighten her, but she knew that hiding her secrets would cause more damage than virtue.

Maria snapped back to the present and pulled out her left hand from inside her pocket. She stretched her fingers apart, revealing a missing thumb. She heard a quick gasp from Evelyn, then a sob, then a shriek. "Wh-wh-wha-t-what happ-pp-enn-ned to you?!"

Her voice quavering, restraining tears, Maria said, "I was chopping wood in my backyard. One second, I was ready to cook lamb chops on my grill, the next second I was being rushed to the hospital without a thumb." She unclipped her saxophone and set it down in her case, then gingerly sat down next to a frantic Evelyn, who was sobbing hysterically. "It's all right, Evelyn. It's had time to heal and all-

"No, it's *not* all right! Why didn't you come and tell me about this? When did this happen? How are you going on with your *life* like this?"

"I didn't mean to avoid you for any other reason than this situation happening; I knew that you were going to react adversely, and I just want you to know that I'm okay-

"*Maria!* Do you hear what you're saying?" Loose strands of hair were sticking to her increasingly sweaty forehead. "You chopped off your finger and not a *word* was spoken about it? I care endlessly about your wellbeing, and, well, I don't think you're doing too great right now!"

Maria shifted, uneasy, "Evelyn, it's okay. It could have been a lot worse, and I healed without infection or complications."

"Um, you seem to have healed fine - but it doesn't seem like your thumb, you know, grew back or something!"

Maria hadn't realized that tears were streaming down her face until she caught a glimpse of her reflection in a mirror hanging on the wall. "Evelyn..." she croaked.

"Yeah?" she answered, quietly and subdued.

Maria reached over and cradled Evelyn in a hug. They both wept together; they had lost the most important thing that had kept them together.

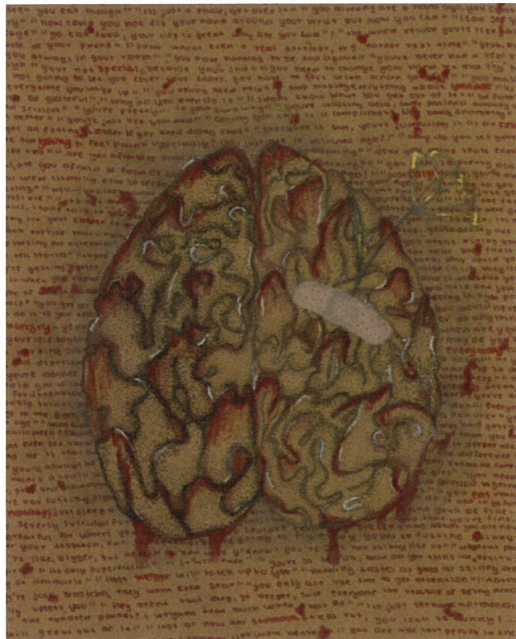


Aya Hinawi

Embarrassment

An apocalypse confined to a human body.
Tides crashing and stirring near the surface,
Chipping away at the membrane,
The core cracking from within,
Thoughts tumbling out of the mind like boulders.
The boulders smack and rumble the eyes,
The blood cannot make sense of where to go,
Trembling hands cause pools to rise and overflow.
The pools cover the strained eyes,
But the tsunami rushes to the head and crashes,
The nose and ears tingle from the heat.
The heart thuds sending vibrations,
They jolt the tips of fingers and toes,
The vibrations return to the quivering stomach,
There the ocean churns and becomes knotted,
Magma boils in the depth from the commotion,
The boulders scatter and break into needles,
They pierce every inch of skin,
Stinging that causes more tremors in the volcano.
It erupts, painting the scene with guilt.

Tim Charles



Ellie Reyna-Lalier

Sloth

it's when you groan painfully on early Monday mornings;
when your hand reaches out, groping blindly, to press *SNOOZE*.
and it's in the sound of your head hitting the pillow, soft as a whisper,
as you burrow deeper into the bed and farther away from the looming day.

it's when the movie drones on, something about love and loss and life,
and it starts to all blend together, voices layering like layers in a cake,
and the next thing you know the credits are rolling
and someone's asking, "what did you think?" and you don't have a response.

it's when the dog blinks up at you, tongue half out of its mouth,
from its hamster hole underneath the couch
and you hold up the leash, squeak a dog toy, say *let's go*
and the dog stays where it is, yawns, and closes its eyes.

it's when the trumpet players can't hit that high c
and when the pianist can't reach Rachmaninoff's chord
and when the oboist can't find a good reed
and none of them can muster up the motivation to try again.

and in that one tremulous moment in the concert
where there is still time to get back on track from the rocky beginning,
the lilting melody, supposed to be sweet and light,
falters and falls, thundering like a giant on its way out.

Natalie Garson



Aya Hinawi

Thanksgiving

She clutched her flip flops with one hand and dragged her suitcase with the other. Thanking her driver, she opened the gate to the house and walked briskly to the front porch. She half expected to hear a sizzling noise as the bottoms of her feet touched the sidewalk. She knew the afternoon heat well, but it had been awhile. Once she climbed the steps and was under the shade of the porch, she rested her suitcase by her side and used her free hand to open the door. She ducked her head in. A tired “Hello?” slid out of her, followed by a sigh. No response.

Standing in the doorway with her belongings, she hardly knew what to do with herself. Light permeated through the windows to her right, illuminating the dining room table and its plate of cookies. To her left was the slate gray couch. She eyed her sister’s computer resting on one of the cushions. She looked around again, hoping someone would then appear to greet her. Placing her flip flops next to the computer, she grabbed the handle of her suitcase and started walking to her room at the end of the hallway.

A text from her mother: “*at the beach. come meet us? usual spot.*” She rested her phone on the nightstand and reached down to grab a royal blue bikini out of the bin under her bed. She took her time to change then, fiddling with the straps and adjusting the fabric to get its full coverage. Tracing her finger along the light purple trim, she tried to think about where she might have left her black sunglasses the last time she was here. She grabbed her sweatshirt on her way out, the same one that had been her older brother’s when he was a student at the college she was now attending. Dressed, she walked again down the hallway and started the three-block trek to the beach.

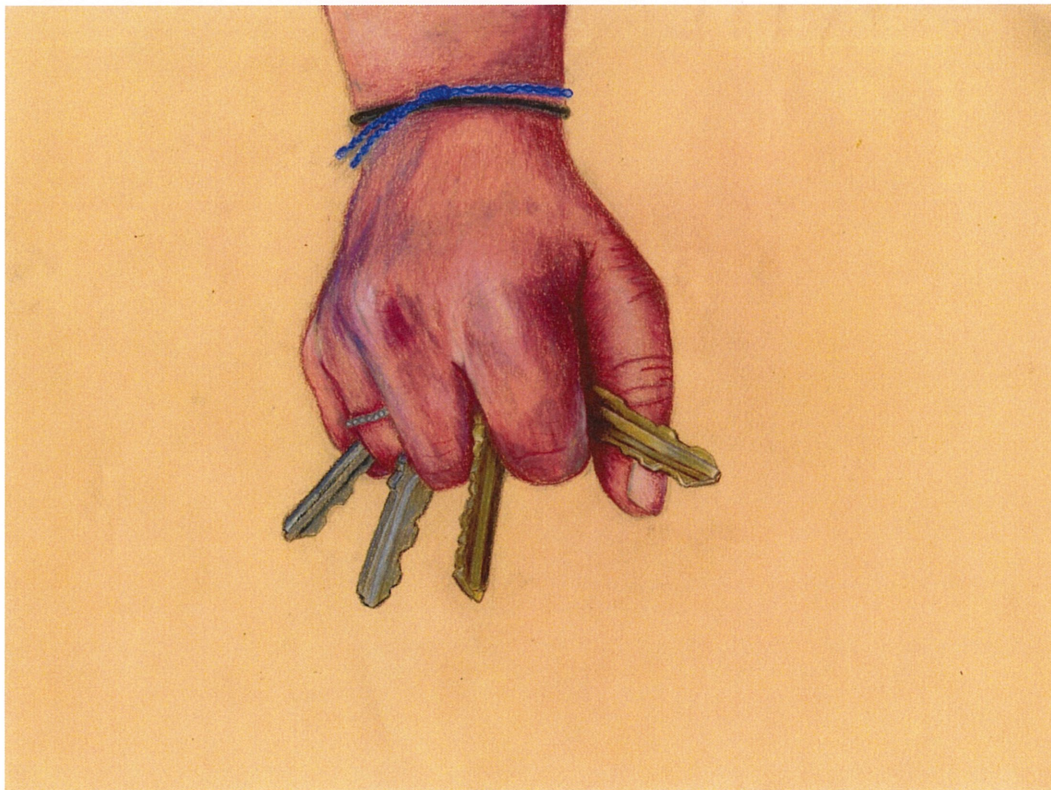
She didn’t rush there. Her aunts and uncles and cousins and other family and their dogs would all be perched on their chairs, trying to get their summer tans back even though it was November. They can wait, she thought to herself. And so, she turned right where she was supposed to continue straight, taking a different route where she would find her favorite patch of dark pink flowers along the property line of a yellow house that she loved to look at. When she got there, she realized her hometown was starting to feel less and less comforting the more time she spends back East.

Sabine Hinkaty

"The New Colossus" Counter Poem

Analogous with the brazen giant of Greek fame,
Detained and intimidating the second they set foot on land;
Here, at our city on a hill, jail bars shall stand
A distasteful woman with a torch, whose flame
Is kindled by the grief of her entrusting people, and her name
Guardian of The Hill. From her beacon-hand
True intentions gleam: her forbidding gaze defends
The harbor from vessels bearing foreign wanderers.
"Give me, ancient lands, your concealed mastery!" cries she
With silent lips. "Keep the crime, the violence,
Your unworthy and disturbed people,
For the wretched refuse of your teeming shore is not our problem.
The homeless and tempest-tost have no place here,
I douse my lamp and shut the golden door!"

Lucca Forrest



Stella Stephens

Lust

She stares at her phone
flipping through countless photos.
Models covered in makeup
stare back seductively.
Countless products sit
Splattered across their face,
A never-ending stream of
Beauty products.
Jet black eyeliner,
Ruby rose blush,
Sparkling blue lipstick,
And makeup of every kind.
“Will they make me pretty?” she asks.

She stares at the couples
Walking past her window,
And wonders what love truly means.
Is it a hand combing through your hair
as you look at the stars,
Or the longing touch
of another human
on your shoulder.
Or is it something else entirely.
“Will I ever know?” she asks.

She stares at the vines
outside her window.
Call to the cold world
Yearning with a desire to be touched.
That's why they keep growing,
Taking over everything,
Clinging to the sides of buildings
like wrapping paper on a present.
Embodying the pure touch
And drive of nature,
“Will they ever get what they are looking for?” she asks.

She stares at the dogs
Mating in the alleyway.
They drive to reproduce
to expand, but for what reason.

Is it for pleasure
or the instinct to evolve?
Why do her dogs mate
like they are in love?
It can't be love though,
for animals aren't so romantic.
"Will the animals ever know true love?" she asks.

Noah Greenwald



Joan Moon

A note from Sander: The piece I have submitted was written in response to Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Conqueror Worm". In his poem, Poe describes life as a play written by God called "The Tragedy of Man", with the hero of the story being a conquering worm, representing death, who ends the suffering of those on Earth. What I have written is a theoretical review a theater critic would write of such a play.

A REVIEW OF *THE TRAGEDY OF MAN*

by *The Angel Jophiel*

Yahweh's new production, *The Tragedy of Man*, is a very dull play. It may very well be the dullest we've ever shown. These worshippers are incredibly boring. Their tricks and inventions are incredibly contrived. I couldn't even stay awake during their dark ages. To me, it just seemed very repetitive. The characters would argue and fight and kill each other until someone succeeded and then it would all repeat. They didn't even seem to know **why they were on the stage in the first place**. They simply roamed around the stage with the grace of a dying whale with anxiety trying to order something that's not on the menu at a restaurant. It was horrifying to watch but I just couldn't look away. I didn't know what to compare it to but then the play introduced a concept ironically like itself, a dumpster fire. Before watching this play, I didn't even think it was possible for angels to get secondhand embarrassment. This show proved me wrong, perhaps the only thing it managed to succeed at. In all my millennia as a critic I have never been so eager to see our favorite hero come in to save the production. Sadly, it took over two hundred thousand years to see it.

Personally, I much preferred Yahweh's previous play *Dino? Die Yes*. Those Dinosaurs had amazing comedic timing and who knew Stegosauruses could sing that well? And having the worm enter from stage up in the form of a meteor was brilliant. Alas that is not the play we got. Although there were many easter eggs to my beloved creatures found by the main characters in various places, it just wasn't enough to keep me engaged. However, the way The Conqueror Worm ended the play blew me out of the water. I won't spoil it for you, but it was amazingly creative. Overall, I would give *The Tragedy of Man* 4.5/10 Halos.

Sander Markley

Taylor Swift

She tentatively sits down to the piano,
Her iconic blonde bangs plastered to her shiny forehead
The sparkles of her golden unitard reflecting on the instrument
Smiling with those red lips, bright as a 1950s Maserati
as the crowd goes wild, overcome with anticipation
She begins to softly play notes while delivering a speech,
Thanking the audience for their support, looking back on their long journey together
Speaking as if they were old friends, reminiscing about the good old days

When she starts to sing, her strong but bold voice is echoed by the swaying bodies off the stage
Looking out into the dark seats with an earnest glare
She has the innocence of a lost child in the grocery store,
desperately searching for comfort in the eyes of strangers
When the chorus comes on, she knowingly smiles like she's sharing an inside joke with her fans
She understands the effect she has on them, and doesn't hesitate to milk their reaction

During the climax of the song, her shaggy hair shakes to the beat,
Closing her eyes from the emotion the ballad brings her,
she belts out the lyrics with passion and deliberation
Underneath the piano, her boots slowly tap to the rhythm,
Hidden from the crowd
Just pure Taylor, caught up in the music

The notes slow, and the song comes to an end
Looking out to the grateful crowd, then smiling softly to herself
She stands, her jacket flaring out behind like a peacock unfurling its glorious colors
Royal to the core, with the grace of a true Princess
A quick look back at the fans she devotes her life to,
Then walks slowly off the stage, leaving behind a trail of happy tears and overjoyed screams.

Macey Renzin

Bloody Mary

“A Bloody Mary, please.” The man was calling up to the counter as I walked through the heavy doors into the old bar. He was a man about in his fifties, with a long, dark beard sneaking out of his chin and down past his neck. He was sitting with two other men around his age; I put together in my mind from those neon pinnies they were wearing that they were probably workers from the construction site next door who’d gone to have a drink after work. I looked around the small, half-empty bar, and when I didn’t see Amy anywhere, I went and got a table for two. For an old bar, it was in very good shape; with the shiny wooden tables, polished windows, and good service that suited a little date night perfectly. It was a chilly December evening, and I was glad to be welcomed into the consoling heat and comfortable atmosphere; music was playing and lights were shining, but nothing too crazy.

As I sat there waiting for my date, running my fingers through the little cracks in the wooden table, I saw out of the corner of my eye the waiter, an old man with white hair covering his head in wisps, bringing the man the Bloody Mary he had ordered. The waiter was walking kind of funny; he wasn’t limping, his back wasn’t curved, no, but he was walking... slower. He was more and more out of breath with each step. He started swaying a little, and his eyes looked dreamy. He finally landed at the table, but before he could set down the Bloody Mary with his trembling, wrinkled, veiny hand that had now turned white, he let out a gasp and grabbed his left shoulder. The tray with the Bloody Mary smashed on the ground, its contents spilling all over the floor, and the man who ordered the drink leapt back. I got up from my seat and ran over to the old man, catching him just as his knees buckled and he fell backwards.

After the sounds of glass smashing on the floor and the waiter’s attention-grabbing gasp and fall, almost everyone in the bar turned from whichever direction they were facing to look at the scene, some getting up to help, a woman sitting at the counter calling 911. The waiter was conscious but kept clutching his left shoulder and wincing in pain. In the next few minutes, a lot happened: I set the old man gently on the floor, not caring that the red drink that had spilled on the ground was seeping through his white button-up long-sleeve; one of the other waiters got him a glass of water, some people were asking the man questions, others panicking. Sooner than I expected, the paramedics came and started checking the man’s pulse, heartbeat, touching around his area of shoulder pain. The paramedics asked the man if he had ever had a stroke, heart attack, or any type of long-term disease throughout his lifetime. I heard a weak, trembling voice answer, “I had a stroke once about ten years ago-- before I collapsed, I felt this exact same shoulder pain...” After the paramedics put the poor old waiter on a stretcher and wheeled him off to the ambulance, Amy finally walked in. She was wearing a pretty light blue dress that fell under her knees, but I didn’t really feel like having a drink anymore; especially after Amy told me that when she was walking into the bar, she saw an ambulance outside and heard people around it saying that a man was dead.

Johanna Nollen

memory

i sit on the sunroom floor,
the one that was taken away,
suddenly replaced with a shiny new kitchen.

i can feel the sunlight shining through the window,
as the warm light shifts across my body, flitting across my outstretched hand.

the beatles' come together fills the room on my father's record player,
are the birds jealous that we too have our own songs?

i'm one of the lucky ones,
my childhood wasn't ripped away from me,
a sudden stab to the gut,
instead the blade slowly twisted and turned as my childhood silently bled away from me.

over time john lennon faded into just another voice in the background,
resurfacing only on mp3

Zoe Fingleton



Joan Moon

He Tried to Shoot Your Head Through Me

I'm so glad we made it through.

...

"Hey mom, how have you been?" Emma asked as she brought her phone up to her ear. She was working on a paper for an English class. "I feel like we haven't spoken much lately." She kept talking as she was typing away, nodding her head, as she was too immersed in her work. Her mom knew she was a hard worker, and she had been ever since she was young.

...

"EMMA, BE CAREFUL!" Mary said to her five-year-old daughter who was playing with her dad on the new playground set. Being so young, her mom was always worried about her. She was so carefree and didn't know the dangers of the world. Her mom was young to have a child but having a loving partner made things easier. "Emma, sweetheart, you have to be more careful on the playground, or else you will get hurt and won't be able to play for a while," Mary said as Emma ran over to drink some water.

"I'm sorry Mama," Emma replied. Her doe eyes looked up at her now squatted mother, who had a warm smile on her face. "Daddy and I were having so much fun!" Emma exclaimed. With a wide smile, she ran back to her dad, who was sitting on the swing. Smiling at both her parents, she didn't want her happy life to change.

...

She hadn't told her mom what had happened a few weeks ago; she didn't want her to worry. She had tried keeping her mind off the incident, busying herself with schoolwork and extra hours at her part time job at Shake Shack.

"Emma?" Her mother called for her as she sighed, knowing she was a busy senior at UCLA. "Listen, Emma, I don't know if you're listening, but I have some news I need to share with you," Mary said as Emma quickly stopped writing. Panic started seeping through her whole body, and she knew that whatever news she was about to hear wasn't good.

"From your tone I can tell something's wrong," Emma said, carefully sitting up from her lying position, "What is it?"

"Remember," Mary started saying as Emma knew exactly what she was talking about. Emma didn't want to remember that day. Never again. Even if it was so long ago it still left a trigger for any loud sounds and left her in a traumatic stage. She spent any years in therapy, talking to specialists about what happened and changing the perspective of what happened. Or at least she tried to.

...

It was just a simple day; Emma was in line waiting to speak to congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords at a Safeway. Just a regular day. Not really. Suddenly she heard popping sounds coming from behind her. She saw a man, all in black, holding something she had feared ever since she watched a documentary about school shootings. Bang. Then another bang. The man in black was walking down the line of women shooting them as he walked past. Quickly being slammed down, her mom had blocked her view from the man. Emma

was terrified for her life. She had quietly prayed to God as she was shaking, staying as quiet as possible. Thank God she was in a corner by a car as she was able to hide where the man couldn't see her. He could see her mom though. Hearing another bang she flinched, closing her eyes as she felt liquid splatter on her face. She saw her mom leaning against the wall behind her with red liquid dripping down her left arm. She put her hand on her mouth in horror as she was in shock. She was still quiet. She didn't want to die today. Her life was just starting. Looking over to her right she saw the butchers coming out from their shop across the street to help the victims. Emma held a butcher cloth to her mom's gun wound as she looked around frantically. Thank God the two men tackled the shooter, Jared Loughner, and held him down until help came. A bystander must have called the police, because not too long after the police came roaring down with their sirens on with the EMT's right behind them.

...

"-the shooter Jared? He died in jail a few days ago," Mary finished, as chills went through Emma's body hearing his name. Images rushed back into Emma's brain as she held her head in both of her hands, tempted to scream. Emma started breathing heavily as the room started spinning around her. Looking around with her mom still on the call, she knew she was having a panic attack and needed to calm down. Laying back down on her bed she started taking deep breaths, counting to fifty, and doing what she could to get those images out of her mind. Ten minutes later Emma had finally calmed down and was ready to talk. Emma knew she and her mom and many of those people there that day on January 8, 2011, have survived and continued living. Moving on with their life, with the help of others, Emma and her mom could look back and thank everyone who was there to save them and continue doing justice for those who unfortunately passed.

"I'm so glad we made it through," Emma said to her mom, now all calmed down, as her mom sighed on the other end of the call replying.

Chia-Ying Fusco

Wrath: An Elemental Sin

It's the slow absorption of capsaicin on the tongue,
the lethal compound from ground-up peppers in hot sauce.
Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen - elements so sweeping, so rampant
so basic, yet of the complexity to steadily burn the sinuses with no remorse.

Electrons form angry bonds,
unstable atoms shaking, writhing like hungry animals.
Hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, making nitric acid -
an acid as corrosive as the choking vines and gripping roots of the forest.

Carbon, nitrogen, triple bond,
cyanide. A pestilential chemical boiling with rage,
indignantly floating as toxic vapors,
posing its impending threat camouflaged in the air.

Two manganese atoms, skirted with seven oxygen atoms,
make manganese heptoxide. Passionate, furious plumes of
red, orange, and a shrieking, blinding white
explode with suppressed exasperation.

Sofia Eliasi



Liam Shanley

Digital Exorcist

Each day it is getting harder to distinguish what is organic reality or a lethargic haze of digitized emotion and metal.

Nex rang the doorbell. A woman's voice cries out from the intercom. "Are you the...?" she asks in a raspy voice.

"Indeed, I am, Mrs. Gates," Nex asserts. "You called because of your husband." The door buzzes open revealing the woman. She has bags underneath her eyes and her skin is wrinkled and dry. Gesturing him to come inside, she limps towards the living room. Trash and other paraphernalia litter the floor. Broad strokes of chipped paint over the walls. Mismatched furniture with charming imperfections. It was picturesque in its own way; a window into daily life; a silence in a loud world.

"Mister," a little girl interrupted. Nex jumped.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't see you there."

"Are you going to help my father?" the girl questioned adamantly.

"Lexa," her mother shouted, "be polite to the young man."

"I'll do the best I can," Nex reassures. He kneels to get a better look at Lexa as gently grabs her hand. "But I can't make any promises. Be strong for your father." Trying to hold back any sign of sadness, Lexa's eyes began to tear up. "Would you like to tell me where your father is?" he said calmly. The little girl leads the way to her parents' bedroom.

"Stay here for a moment," Mrs. Gates told her daughter. Mr. Gates lies on the bed. His arms appear stiff like a machine with no power. Eyes flicker on and off, a sign of an optical mod malfunction. The room light reflects off his mechanical limbs. Judging by some visible scarring, this man partook in some brain augmentations.

"Who's that? Iris," he wheezes, "don't tell me it's another doctor. We've already got too much to pay for." His bed moves slightly. Struggling to maintain his ability to speak, Mr. Gates continues to cough and cough.

"Do something," Mrs. Gates pleads, "I can't bear seeing him like this anymore. Since a few days ago, he's been sick, but every time we try to help, we get pushed back; he's been tearing up the furniture without even making contact, so we turned to Specialists to call you. Unearthly phenomenon and machines are what you specialize in according to Cadral News. You're even the only digital exorcist we could afford who would come to the lower districts of the kingdom."

"Don't worry, this isn't the first time I've been called through that cheap job site" Nex responds. He takes a quick glance over the bedridden man. "Your husband seems to be going through a conversion period."

"A what?" she interjects.

"Mr. Gates is starting to become a Virtual Ghost, a vengeful spirit born from an unnatural connection to cyberspace and physical space; a process speeds up after death depending on the amount of cybernetic mods and unfinished business an individual has. An anomaly that still perplexes masters in the field to this day, but I always suspected it might be a form of punishment from our diving machine god, Minad, for challenging his

power. After all, humans don't know when to quit when it comes to progress." Nex moves a little closer to see the ailing man. "How many mods does he have?"

"Not much. We have been struggling financially and it has been difficult for my husband to find a job with his obsolete implants; he was always competing with those with the latest technology"

"The modern age certainly has its perks," Nex says sarcastically. "One moment a man is crippled. Next, he's running laps, solving complex equations, and competing for your husband's job all at the same time." Nex activates his ocu-tech. Cybernetic implants plague Mr. Gates' body; some of the implants look old complying with his wife's earlier remarks, but others appear new and experimental. "Your husband seems to have withheld information about his enhancements," Nex reveals. Mrs. Gates looks at him with disbelief.

"He would never do such a thing, I know it!"

"Come here and feel his hand." Mrs. Gates approaches slowly. Her hands were shaking in anxiety. Inhuman. Mr. Gates had an inhuman feeling to his hands. Covering her eyes, Mrs. Gates sobs.

"Discrete augmentations. Appears human, but those engineers could never truly capture the feeling of one." Nex reaches out to touch Mr. Gates' forehead with his inhuman hands and establishes a bridge between them. A surge passes through. Minds were linked. A connection of two souls.

...

Communicating in cyberspace always felt strange.

Despite a body not being directly present, senses could still function perfectly—each one resulting from a spiritual connection binding two minds together.

Nex and Mr. Gates stare directly at each other. They match each other's presence in a balance. "Mr. Gates," Nex shouts, "I've come to help you and your family pass on."

"I have to decline your offer," he answers, "as I have no plan of letting my family pass on as I plan to live through this."

"Don't be in denial. Everything must die, and your time has arrived. I will not repeat myself."

"No," he shouts, "I will live and provide for my family for decades to come. It's the reason why I let someone in a corporate suit install experimental modifications to my body; the CEOs running this kingdom could get test results while I receive a chance. A chance to finally correct my life, my family's life."

"I understand what you're going through," Nex counters, "having the thought of leaving behind a daughter and a wife to fend for themselves. Getting augmentations just to help your family. It can be terrifying. I know, I lost my father too and he was just like you," Nex argued. "He obtained enhancements to save himself and with his gifts chose to support my mother and I, but he was becoming a virtual ghost and hurting those around him. My father needed to be exorcised because my mother could no longer see him suffering" Nex adds. "We grieved, but we never let that ruin us. My mother and I worked hard just as my father would have wanted." A tear starts to fall from the exorcist's eye. "Sometimes you just need to have a little faith. After all, aren't they your family?" Mr. Gates looks at him with a melancholic glare.

“I just wanted to do what was best for them. Please tell them,” He decides, “I’m sorry...”

...

Nex and Mrs. Gates step outside the room to greet Lexa who sat down on the floor. They look at each other and without a word, she understands the entire story: Her father secretly obtained augmentations, so he could get a job and support his family. She wipes her eyes but remembers what Nex told her. *Be strong for your father.* “Mister, why do you do this job?” Lexa wondered.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Nex says. A haunting aura of noxious death and the foul-smelling odor of metal seizes the room. A brief glimpse of Nex jacked into his father before transitioning to his exorcism arrives.

Eric Louis Bagtas



Paige Sanchez

The Church on the Hill

The sunny day bells are oh ringing
The faces of future past come blasting past the doors that once held love
Now they are empty
The Sunday class that used to pass are all grown up it's over now it's done
As I look out to the empty congregation made up of dusted air and old dried blood
I realize the love that was here
right here
is not done
I'll start a new church
a new congregation
spread more of this love that is my new foundation
Let's all hear the church bell
let's all hear the choir
let's bring back this long dead church
and make it like a burning red-hot fire

Jael Sanchez



Xenia Hernandez

Laughing Through the Bitter Cold

Scarfs drooped over our shoulders,
like the branches of a weeping willow tree
My hair was catching in the wind,
blowing in his face,
but he laughed it off
And his,
hidden by his hood,
shielded from the bitter cold.

Irritable New Yorkers passed us,
hands shoved in their pockets
They stared intently at the floor
And I couldn't figure out,
what interesting thing was down there.

But in that moment,
with our arms around each other,
sprinkled by the dancing snow,
we were alone.
We ignored the cold and focused,
on the flurries of snow,
on the piles that outlined the sidewalk,
the crushed gum that scattered the ground like a paint splatter,
and the smell of the nearby pizzeria.

My smile was not forced
We were not posing for the camera
Just being kids,
finding the joy in the raw chill of winter,
when no one else could.

Sofia Dufour